Proceedings of ICSPHS 2026 Symposium:Ethics, Law, and Psychology: Interdisciplinary Reconstruction of Humanities in Medicine
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

Analysis of Schumann's "Fantasia" Melody Characteristics: Taking "Pattern Op.18" as an Example

Zhuoyao Xu

School of Music & Drama, ZhengZhou SIAS University, Zhengzhou, China
lindaxuwafw@foxmail.com

Abstract. Robert Schumann was a 19th-century German composer and music critic. "Pattern Op.18 "is a piano solo piece created by Schumann in 1839, which is closely related to Schumann's emotional life. 1839 was the year before Schumann's marriage to Clara Wick, and at this stage, and he was in a period of high creative enthusiasm, with the piano becoming his primary medium for emotional expression. This article discusses the study of Schumann's "Pattern Op.18" in three parts: firstly, an introduction to Schumann and the creative background of "Pattern Op.18"; secondly, an analysis of the melodic features of the work; and thirdly, a specific manifestation of the work's fantasy. By reviewing relevant academic literature and analyzing musical examples from both domestic and international sources, Schumann's expression of light and lively sweet longing, gentle and deep emotional expression, strong emotional tension, and hazy and distant beautiful imagination in his performance, as well as the melancholic and contemplative tone, imaginative and poetic flow, gentle and warm moments, and the unity of technique and emotion in his creation, are obtained. It is hoped that this can inspire performers to find suitable performance methods.

Keywords: Schumann, Pattern Op.18, melodic characteristics, Fantastic

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

Schumann's "Pattern Op.18" was created in 1839 and has a distinct romantic style and lyrical characteristics. This work is regarded as one of Schumann's representative piano compositions. In 1839, just one year before Schumann married Clara Schumann, he was in a relatively smooth stage of his career and emotional life. He first incorporated "Arabic style" into piano composition, with beautiful and imaginative melodies, reflecting Schumann's preference for decorative melodies. The whole piece adopts a rondo style, with alternating themes in C major and interludes in e minor and a minor, presenting a constantly shifting sense of fantasy in the smooth overall structure. By combining lyricism and improvisation, the work creates a gentle tone through harmony and delicate touch, thereby enhancing the imaginative atmosphere of music.

© 2026 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

1.2. Research significance

Schumann's "Pattern Op.18" adopts the form of a rondo, which combines traditional elements with Schumann's personal creativity in structure. The melodic patterns used in the music are highly decorative, and the lyrical fantasy style is a prominent feature of this work. The work naturally blends technique and emotion through meticulous fingering and hierarchical sound patterns. As a work by Schumann, "Pattern Op.18" has high musical educational value. In summary, Schumann's "Pattern Op.18" not only provides a new perspective for musical form and emotional expression, but also has important significance for learners. Based on the above characteristics, this paper selects this song as the research object.

1.3. Research questions

This study will explore the main elements and presentation methods of the melodic features of "Hua Shi"; What techniques are used in the development of the melody in "Pattern" and what content was expressed; What are the melodic characteristics and emotions expressed in "Hua Shi", and how do the melodic characteristics of "Hua Shi" affect future generations. The author will use literature review, score analysis, and practical summary methods to write this paper. By reviewing relevant academic literature, music reviews, books, performance skills tutorials, and analyzing the score examples of music works at home and abroad, the theoretical points of literature research and practical experience of comparative research will be transformed into actionable performance skills. Practice facilitates the conversion of theory into specific performance control, offering new perspectives for researching how to play the repertoire more effectively and for studying Romantic music.

1.4. Explanation of nouns

1.4.1. Schumann

Schumann is a German composer acclaimed as the poet of music and his music works have characteristic literary and lyrical specification. Regarding musical compilation, he stresses on the fusion of music and poetry. He wrote piano cycles (like "Papillons ""Carnaval" and "Kinderszenen"), song cycles (like "The Poet's Love" and "Women Love and life").

1.4.2. Pattern Op.18

It is also simply referred to as Arabesque in C Major, Op. 18, as it is one of the piano pieces that was laden with ornamental melodies and the feeling of fantasy. The name Arabesque is inspired through the decorative patterns in architecture where the beauty of ornament in architectural decoration is equivalent to the ornament in music. Musically, it is marked with the sensitive melodies and the use of chromatic harmony.

1.4.3. Melody features

In melodic linearity, this piece is an extension of melodic linearity of the Romantic music, giving the perception of musical fluidity in the way of flowing note patterns and the use of ornaments in notes. This is in contrast to the Classical monotony of music. In the cases of lyricism and fantasy, the musical piece incorporates the sentimentality of Schumann to Clara. The music plays out poetry and

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

fantasy through melodic prolongations and smooth treatment of the rhythm with the clear lyrical features showing the focus of the composer on the emotional expression. In the case of ornamental notes, the Arabesque in the title is taken out of the decorative pattern that was used in architectural regions in Spain and Italy. This decorative element is reflected in the music by magnificent note patterns, and techniques of improvisational playing.

1.4.4. Fantasy

It can be explained as the manifestation of subjective moods, inner space, and visualized scenarios of the composer in music, which is usually carried out in the free and non-traditional approach, focusing on the free flow of the sentiments and individual interpretation of art.

2. Literature review

The study of the imaginary nature and musical performance methods of "Pattern" has been a crucial element of interest in the academic community in regard to the field of research on the piano work of Robert Schumann. The current studies have borne staged fruits, even though they can be explored more.

In the previous studies, the analytical framework by Liu Yudi provides the much-needed theoretical basis upon which the characteristics of the fantasticality of the work Patterns can be analyzed. It is a structure that depends on the aspect of the musical being and it is explicitly suggested that the fantasy quality is eminently projected in melodies, rhythm and harmony. The distinct melody flow is not tied down to the rules of the traditional tonality and it produces a vivacious and ethereal sounding experience. The fluctuating and movable rhythm set by variations in meters and alterations in accents undermine the feeling of regular rhythm and grant the music the freedom of flowing [1]. The artistic hazy idea is augmented by the employment of harmonious colors as well as the chord structure and the lack of tonal progression [2]. The combination of these three aspects builds up the fantasy features of the work as well as offers a clear way of analysis to be followed later during research.

Moreover, academic research on other piano pieces by Schumann has also proved to be of indirect use in the attempt to explore fantasy aspects on the composition of the fantasy "Muster. To cite one example, even though the studies of "Fantasy Pieces Op.12" and "Fantasy Op.73" do not consider the concept of fantasy as the central point of entry, when examining the criteria of romantic style, logic of emotional expression and musical image shaping ingredients of these two pieces, the creative thoughts and expressive features in question are intrinsically tied to fantasy nature, which permeates the music of Schumann [3,4]. These studies may become an intertextual verification with the study of the fantasy aspects in "Muster" which not only enhance the comprehension of the fantasies aspects of the piece but also serve to form a comprehensive cognitive system to the fantasies - associated creative features of the music of Schumann.

In broad terms, the available studies have evidently concentrated on the fantasy aspect of the Pattern, and the associated performance methods that sets a platform to explore the musical style of Schumann comprehensively. Nevertheless, evident gaps in the research still exist. To begin with, a systematic comparison of the fantasy features in Pattern and other works of Schumann has not been carried out, which complicates determining the role of this work in the context of Schumann works. Second, the development patterns of the fantasy - based creative methods have not been approached in a systematic way. The studies do not synthesize the life experiences of Schumann and the periods

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

of his creativity such that they comprehensively present the development logic of his fantasy style. These inadequacies will give guidelines into subsequent in-depth studies.

3. The still life of Schumann and the imaginative story of "Pattern Op. 18"

3.1. Introduction to Schumann

He was a legendary figure, a composer and music critic who lived full of romantic feelings, and this suits well the life of Robert Schumann (June 8,1810-July 29,1856), one of the most significant composers and music critics of the 19th-century Germany. Not only did his musical pieces carry on the traditions of the German classics music but put a significant level of innovation in them that had a strong impact on the evolution of the Romantic music [5].

The musical works of Schumann can be of different genres and among them his piano pieces are the most popular and not to mention his symphonies and chamber music. His piano pieces, including "Papillons" "Carnaval" and "Kinderszenen" do not simply consist of beautiful and fascinating melodies but it is also full of a strong sense of literary and programmatic aspects. They focus on an appropriate combination of music and literature and visual arts and hence a unique artistic style [6].

Besides being a composer, Robert Schumann was also a great music critic. The fact that he was a music critic gave music a literary values. He established the new music magazine in 1834. He used this platform to actively endorse and criticize the compositions of modern composers, fight against the dead and the musical conservatism culture, and aid in the growth of Romantic music. His critical articles were deep-thinking and inspiring, and provided new insights and motivation to the music world of that time [7].

The style of composition is deeply affected with the Romantic ideology by Schumann. He insists much on the emotional expression and the description of the inner world and his literature is filled with the spirit of poetry and fantasy. His piano compositions frequently take the genre of titled character - piece cycles, such a plethora of life scenes and emotional impressions, condensed within brief, but effective movements. Moreover, his mastery of the counterpoint technique and multi-layered harmonic textures provides him with a skill to represent complicated psychological transformations and give his musical compositions the depth of connotations and expressiveness [8].

Robert Schumann is a representative of the history of the German Romantic music. His musical compositions as well as his critical essays did not only give a fresh and new life and inspiration to the then music circle but also influenced greatly subsequent-generation musicians. His compositional style is individual and creative, and his music is not deprived of a strong number of emotions and literary values, becoming an important contribution to the evolution of the Romantic music genre. His life was very short and tragic but his musical talent and artistic achievements would always have their remembrance and respect by the world.

3.2. The imaginative history of creative "Pattern Op.18"

3.2.1. Time of creation and motivation

One year before Robert Schumann got married to Clara Schumann (born Clara Wieck) in 1839, the couple was in a stable relationship and in a smooth sail career. Their love and metaphor dreams are clearly reflected in the works of this period by Schumann.

At one point, Schumann had intended to venture into literary produce and frequently used fantasy in his music. This composition is a continuation of his tendency to combine literature and music.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

3.2.2. Styles and structures of music

With the use of the rondo form, the theme in C major switches between the extended sixteenth-note passages and languid episodes. The episodes (in e minor and a minor) are covered with typical romantic touches of Schumann and it may seem as a tribute to Clara.

The coda ends with an Adagio, repetition of tonal treatment style used in Schumann, "Fantasy in C major, Op. 17". The repetitive movements of the music forms a flowing melodic pattern which proves the continuity of the melodic line that Schumann sought in his music [9].

3.2.3. Expression of Feelings

The sensitivity of the piece is presented by the delicacy and the watercolor-like timbre that brings both sophistication and emotional impressions. The tendering call as the final one is assumed to be a show of affection towards Clara.

As music scholars have observed, Schumann even encoded the name of Clara into musical shapes (in such a way that musical figures C-flat B-A-sharp G-A) that adds the extra privacy and commemoration meaning to the work [10].

3.2.4. Historical evaluation

The song is considered to be one of the masterpieces of the piano works by Schumann. This structure with its imagination has had a forceful impact on subsequent Romantic music.

4. The melodic characteristics of Schumann, patterns Op.18: analysis

4.1. Melodic morphological characteristics of pattern Op.18

All over melody, the extensive use of smooth movement of sixteenth-notes, alternating with slow interludes is present, the rhythm features a distinct contrast. The decorative music figures resemble the fine architecture of Arabian in providing the music with good lyricism. In the meantime, the freely served phrases provide the music with greater improvisational aspects. The entire composition is a rondo and the main part is contrasted by two contrasting episodes. The major key of the piece is C, and the key of the e and a minor episodes, the contrast of key is applied to make the piece a musical expressiveness [11].

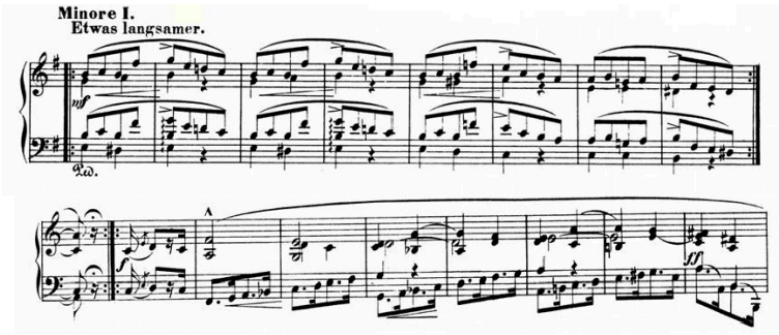

Figure 1. Schumann pattern op.18 first and second inserts (excerpts from subsections 43-50;155-163)

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

As shown in Figure 1, the two episodes are in the minor key and played at a slower tempo, presenting a stark contrast to the major key and being full of a dreamy quality.

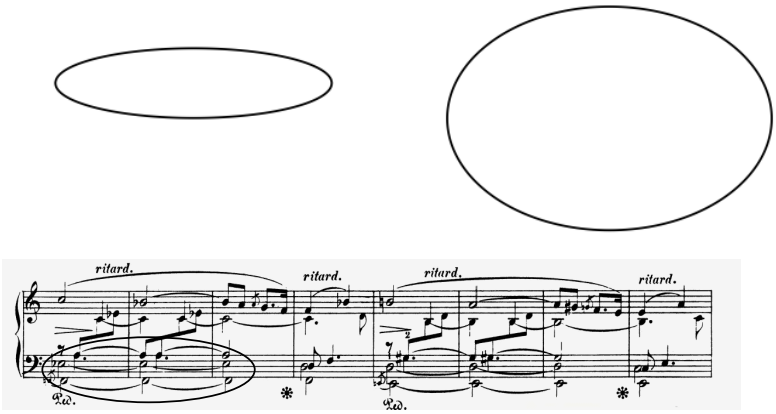

Figure 2. Schumann pattern op.18 first plug-in expansion section (excerpts from subsections 91-98)

The passages following the first episode (as shown in Figure 2) predominantly employ lines, featuring a gentle tempo and a melody that is both graceful and full of fantasy.



Figure 3. Schumann pattern op.18 second plug-in part (excerpts from subsections 155-163)

The freely extended tones in the second episode (as shown in Figure 3) evoke boundless reverie and are imbued with a dreamy quality. Subsequently, the melody adopts a progressive pattern, featuring a lively rhythm without sacrificing lyricism.

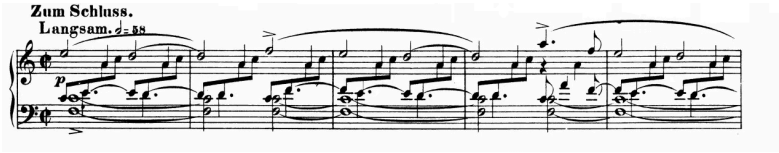

Figure 4. The final of Schumann pattern op.18 (excerpts from subsections 215-219)

A complicated interlude restored the main key of the piano piece in the coda (Figure 4), and created a complete imitation of a rondo.

As it is illustrated in the four musical pieces mentioned above, the tune reflects the love that Schumann has towards his lover Clara. The music is accompanied by both emotional and uncontrolled eagerness and gentle and subtle phrases that mirror the happiness state of the composer in the process of composing this work.

4.2. Methods of melodic development in pattern Op.18

Schumann gives more emphasis to the linear movement of melodies composition and more on the lyrical and poetical articulation of melodies.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

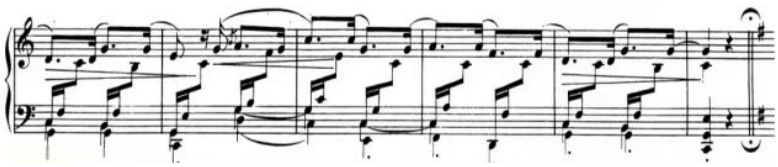

Figure 5. The ending part of the opening paragraph of Schumann pattern op.18 (excerpts from subsections 37-42)

With the help of tricks, like lengthening of the pattern notes, adding ornamental notes and glissandos, the melody acquires a feeling of fluidity and ornamentation, as represented in Figure 5. This kind of style contrasts with the normal rhythm in the classical music.

These works tend to follow the method of multi - voice superposition, according to which a performer has to take into consideration the timbers of various layers. As an example, polyphonic thinking is incorporated into one voice. The polyphonic texture is capable of not just generating a three-dimensional donation of melody, but also rendering a sonic effect of cascading multi-linedness. It not only prevents the laxity introduced in Bach-style polyphony but also gives the melody the attribute of free expression, as imposed upon Romanticism. Schumann uses personal feelings in melody composing. To illustrate, the musical phrases frequently employ such techniques as free long notes, sudden ritardando or accelerando to increase the emotional tension.

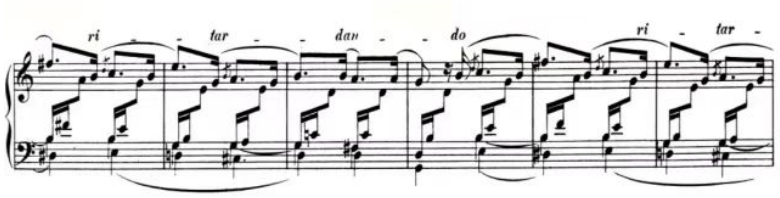

Figure 6. The middle part of the opening section of Schumann pattern op.18 (excerpts from subsections 19-24)

The musical pass continues to slow as it would drift to a dramatic pause as seen in Figure 6. This epiphany adds more tension to the emotional change, giving the next melody even more tension. Later, the melody moves forward with a stronger emotional outcry. This kind of construction gives the music drama and attraction.

To sum up, all the abundance of decorative figurations used in the works which include trills and wavy note-clusters, does more than only keep the melody flowing, but also gives it a hint of grandeur. This style is in sharp contrast to the so-called virtuosic manner of Romantic composers as Liszt, it is more poetically focused, but does not concern the virtuosity of any kind of performance of technical skills.

4.2.1. Chromatic writing

Chromatic melodies (for example, the general shift between the tonic party note of B major and e minor) contribute to the impetus and flowing of the music, blur traditional harmonic roles, and have become a significant compositional method of the Romantic composers.

These attributes had a direct effect on the Impressionist genre of composers like Debussy, were the inspiration of the colorful melodies of Impressionism and driving the changes of the piano music to an era of modernity instead of classicism.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

4.3. Melody and emotional expression of "Pattern Op.18"

In the case of the "Pattern Op.18" written by Schumann the togetherness of two rhythms makes the musical flow resembling to breathing. A majestic though somewhat solemn mood is created with the help of tonal transitions (between C major and e minor, a minor). These musical traits have much to do with the poetical temperament and dual personality of Schumann and the emotionalism of the song is characterized by the inconsistency and the complexity. The work adopts a rondo form. The central theme that is the core is used three times, and with the repetition, there were some small differences because of the augmentation of the colors used in the music in the preceding segments. The speed of passages in sixteenth-notes is opposed to the lyrical slow interludes such as the examples of the passages inserted in Big Spring Little One (e minor) and Big Spring Little Two (a minor), and this adds to the musical decoration and exoticism. The soft shadings of the melody show the high degree of affection Schumann felt towards Clara, whereas the use of the patterns of minor key creates an exotic taste. Tonal wandering and rhythmic changes are the means of expressing this contradictory emotion. The scenes are passionate and exuberant and some are delicate and tender. With such sharp oppositions a lush-stratified romantic utterance is attained.

4.4. Melodic characteristics of an influential impact of the melodic characteristics of the "Pattern Op.18" on future generations

The melodic traits of Schumann "Patterns Op.18" have produced a spiriting effect on the latter composition in musical writing of piano music which is predominantly captured in the linearity of the melodic flow, tonal variation and the use of chromatic writing.

4.4.1. Melodic linearity

As far as melodic form is concerned, the melodic lines are dynamic and transformative, there is beautiful application of ornamental tone and the exquisite rhythmic cadence of the Patterns has taught a visitation to modern composers in relation to melodic innovation. As far as melodic development techniques are concerned, techniques like repetition and varied repetition, sequence and transposition, contrast and juxtaposition in Patterns have provided useful guidelines to melodic constructions by modern composers in encouraging melodic progression.

4.4.2. Tonality change

To ease the modulation, Schumann did not follow the conventional tonal pattern, but used chromatic patterns (the ascent step-by-step pattern of e1-to f1-to sharp f1-to g1). This made the melody smooth and full of color variations, which provided an outlet into emotions to the composers of later generations.

5. Conclusion

The representative piece of the lyrical piano works by Schumann, of the early piano composition covering the period of his works, "Patterns Op. 18" is chosen as the research object. It puts an emphasis on melody sentence and the fundamental traits of the romantic early music which are transported by its expression. The study is done based on the logical study of the melody parts, how it was developed, how it expressed feelings and how it was used in the subsequent generations. Research conclusion indicates that with regards to melody form, smooth running of the sixteenth-

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2026.ZJU31534

notes and alternate slow sections, the decorative patterns follow the pattern of the Arab architecture, the form of rondo and the mixture of the majoring key C with e minor and the minor key is the representative of the melody. It focuses on development of the melody, in the lyrical poetry and multi-part superimposition techniques. It introduces a complicated mood of magnificence and sadness in terms of rhythm and key variation in terms of expression in emotions and is tied to the personal characteristics of Schumann. Impression to the subsequent generations is largely the linear melody lines, key change and semi tones in the writing. Meanwhile, this piece of work occupies its specific place in the musical creation of Schumann. The melodies it uses facilitate the creation and evolution of the musical style of Schumann and plays a major traffic hub in the evolution of the musical melody romanticism. This possesses a special importance in the history of the classical music. In theoretical terms, it offers a concise sample of analysis but with deep insight, reflective as well as practical to the study of Romantic music and hence giving us more insight into the growth of the Romantic music and the style of creativity of Schumann.

References

[1] Liu, Y. A. Brief analysis of the fantasia and performance techniques in Schumann's piano work Patterns. Fujian Normal University, (2022)
[2] Diego, C. Blurred harmonies in Robert [Schumann and Johannes Brahms. Integral: The Journal of Applied Musical Thought, 35, 1–25, (2022)
[3] Lu, Y. Research on the music characteristics and performance techniques of Schumann's piano suite Fantasy Pieces Collection, Op. 12. Qu fu Normal University, (2025)
[4] Wu, J. Analysis of the music style and performance techniques of Schumann's Fantasia, Op. 73. Shandong Academy of Arts, (2023)
[5] Taddeo, T. H. Robert Schumann and Richard Wagner as music critics. De Gruyter, (2024)
[6] He, Z. The features of romantic works in Robert Schumann's piano cycle Kinderszenen, Op. 15. Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Science, 8(9), (2024)
[7] Fang, W. Schumann: Literary expression of piano works. Jiangsu Normal University, (2020)
[8] Li, Y. Research on Schumann's aesthetic thought in music. Shandong Normal University, (2025)
[9] Gao, L. Schumann as poet and composer. Journal of Social Science and Humanities, (2021)
[10] Liu, X. Interpretation of Clara motivation in Schumann's music creation. Shenyang Conservatory of Music, (2022)
[11] Yuan, J. Music analysis and performance techniques of Schumann's Arabian Style. Yunnan Academy of Arts, (2025)